

The Pollard case and Israel – the last straw?

OPINION

✓ JOSEPH C. HARSCH

THE Pollard affair has made a difference in the American reaction to Israeli behavior when such behavior is contrary to United States interests.

In this case the guilty person, Jonathan Jay Pollard, has been given life imprisonment for spying on the United States. The Israeli official who had "handled Pollard" and was later promoted has been indicted by a federal grand jury. He would be arrested if US authorities could get their hands on him. The deed has been branded officially as having damaged the US.

The secretary of defense, Caspar Weinberger, stated in an affidavit to the court that tried and sentenced Pollard that it is difficult "to conceive of a greater harm to national security than that caused by the defendant."

The Israeli government has been surprised by the American treatment of the case. According to a report from Jerusalem to the New York Times, "Israeli officials always thought Washington would conduct an investigation, would be satisfied with a superficial Israeli explanation and would let things pass. . . . The Reagan Administration has been so friendly to this country [Israel] that many officials here have come to feel that nothing Israel does will ever really harm relations with Washington."

Israel officials have a list of reasons for thinking that way.

The classic and mold-setting affair was the Israeli attack on the USS Liberty off the Israeli coast on June 8, 1967. As reported by Lt. James Marquis Ennes Jr., an officer aboard the ship, she was "suddenly and overwhelmingly attacked in international waters by the air and naval forces of Israel. Her decks were strafed with machine-gun fire and scorched by napalm; she was crippled by rocket and torpedo damage; her life rafts, readied for survivors, were machine gunned in the water. Thirty-four of her crew died; scores were seriously wounded."

The attack was pressed for 1½ hours in broad daylight under a clear sky with unlimited visibility. Her flag was flying and she carried all routine US naval recognition marks. During the preceding eight hours she had been reconnoitered eight times by Israeli aircraft and small surface craft, at close enough range for hand signals.

The attack was immediately fol-

lowed by a persistent cover-up. Israel claimed an unfortunate mistake and apologized. Washington officially accepted the apology. The dead were buried in Arlington Cemetery without mention of Israel. The awards given to officers and men of the crew mentioned only that the affair had occurred in "the Eastern Mediterranean."

Since then there have been more examples of Israeli action contrary to US interests. The routine is for either a denial or an apology, which is promptly accepted and the affair allowed to blow over and be forgotten.

Enough uranium for making several nuclear weapons disappeared from US stocks. Israel subsequently built nuclear weapons and presumably tested them in collaboration with South Africa.

Israel has consistently supplied South Africa with weapons, in defiance of US policy toward South Africa.

Israel invaded Lebanon, in defiance of US requests to refrain.

Israel promised to go only a short distance into southern Lebanon. It went on into Beirut.

Israel is supposed to use American-provided weapons for defense only. All types of American weapons were used in the invasion of Lebanon and the attack on Beirut.

Israel consistently supplied arms to Iran during the Iran-Iraq war, in defiance of a American embargo on arms to Iran.

Invariably, Washington accepted any kind of denial or regret from Israel. Not before has there been punitive action taken against any agent of Israel.

Is it different now?

The Pollard case was broken by the Federal Bureau of Investigation before we learned of the Israeli role in the sale of arms to Iran. It is now clear that Israeli officials proposed to Reagan administration agents the Iran arms project which has become for Ronald Reagan the equivalent of a Watergate. According to the Tower Commission report, the Israelis kept it going whenever Americans began to doubt and want to pull out.

In view of the record it is not surprising that Israeli officials did not expect serious objection to their spying operations. They are the ones who are now surprised.

For once they went too far.